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# The Director: Running The C.I.A.

By Joseph Lelyveld

FOR THE CENTRAL Intelligence Agency and its frequently embattled leader, William J. Casey, the start of the second Reagan Administration is more than just the halfway mark in a marathon. Ronald Reagan is the first President in 12 years to take the oath of office for a second time, but it has been 16 years since a head of the American intelligence community last managed to continue in office from one Presidential term to the next. On the previous occasion, in 1969, Richard M. Nixon reluctantly gave in to an argument that he should retain Richard M. Helms as Director of Central Intelligence in order to safeguard the nonpartisan character of the office. There have been five directors since, and Casey — whom no one has ever called nonpartisan — has now survived longest of them all.

This can be regarded as a footnote, a fluke, or an indication that the C.I.A. has essentially weathered the investigations and strictures of the 1970's, that it has recovered much of its old effectiveness and mystique. The present director, who would naturally favor the latter interpretation, has tried to function as if it were so, casting himself in the mold of Allen W. Dulles and John A. McCone, who flourished in the 1950's and early 60's, before serious questions had been raised, on either moral or pragmatic grounds, about covert action on a global scale. Like them, rather than like his immediate predecessors, he has been recognized in Washington and beyond for having ready access to the President. Like them, he has not hesitated to make his voice heard at the White House on policy matters as distinct from intelligence evaluations. (Indeed, he might even be said to have surpassed them in this respect, for, serving a President who values the Cabinet as a forum, he has managed to become the first Director of Central Intelligence ever to sit at the table as a participating Cabinet member.) And like Dulles in particular — fondly known to his subordinates as "the great white case officer" because of his consuming passion for espionage and related games — Mr. Casey is believed to have immersed himself deeply in the day-to-day management of clandestine operations.

Yet for an assortment of reasons — some personal, others having to do with changing times and changed expectations of a director — no one would suggest that official Washington has learned to view William Casey reliving his youth.

Conservative members, who can be nearly as harsh, tend to portray him as the opposite of an activist director: that is, as a captive of a Langley bureaucracy whose major objective, it is alleged, is to shield itself from controversy. The two images overlap, in that neither takes him very seriously as an effective Director of Central Intelligence or an influence on policy, either broadly on matters of national security or narrowly on matters specific to the intelligence community.

What is involved here is more than a clash of perceptions about Casey. It is also a clash of perceptions about what a Director of Central Intelligence should be and, beyond that, about how ready the United States should be to intervene secretly — politically and, especially, militarily — in the affairs of other countries. On both sides — those who think this director is too active and those who think he is not nearly active enough — there is a tendency to forget the fundamental insight that emerged from the investigations of the 1970's: that all directors, finally, are creatures of the Presidents they serve. If Presidents hear intelligence about the world that conflicts with what they would rather believe, they have the option of setting it aside. But no director can ignore the President's goals. The different ways directors interpret their jobs reflect differences among the Presidents who picked them.

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